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THE MIST

A LITTLE PLAY IN THREE SCENES

BY

JULIA ELLSWORTH FORD

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By Julia Ellsworth Ford

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To

JOHN H. HUDDLESTON AND PERCY MACKAYE

THIS LITTLE PLAY IS DEDICATED
IN FRIENDSHIP

PERSONS

The Prince

The Princess Nephelê

The Painter

The Princess' Slave-Maiden, Loka

The Prince's Page

Blow the mist from the Crystal Glass,
Behold the mystic vision pass,
Behold the passing—one perfect day.
Immortal is a perfect thing
Eternal in its perfecting.

Blow the mist from the Crystal Glass,
Behold the mystic vision pass,
Love, an infinite longing,—pain,
Vanishing, ever a will-o'-the-wisp,
Beckoning, wandering in the mist.

Blow the mist from the Crystal Glass,
Behold the vision, hold it fast,
Behold, a wandering dream,—a joy.
Seeking ever a passionate gleam,
Nestling, a mist-enfolded dream.
Descending mist on the Crystal Glass,
Behold the vanishing vision pass.

THE MIST

Place

A dense forest on one side, on the other a great castle is built out of the natural rocks, stone steps lead up to a wide rugged balcony, the balcony encircles a half tower and part of the castle, a large leaded window in the tower reaches to the floor and opens on the balcony overhanging the sea: the sound of the waves dashing against the rocks is heard. The rocks form also a part of the wall which surrounds the place. At the back, in an opening of the rock, an iron gate, through which a glimpse of the sea.

THE MIST

Scene I

Spring

(*Enter Prince and Page*)

The Prince

Have you done as I bid you? My horse, and my men must be here quickly. I have news which bids me hence. I must away at once. Did you summon the slave maiden?

Page

Yes, my Lord, she is coming.

(*Enter Loka*)

The Prince

Loka, tell your mistress to come to me at once.

Loka

Yes, my Lord.

(*Exit Loka*)

THE PRINCESS

(*Enters slowly with downcast eyes. Her gown is soft silver grey*)

THE PRINCE

I must bid you a hurried farewell. I am called away on matters of importance. You are to remain in the castle until I return. Do not step beyond the enclosing wall. My mother will command while I am away.

THE PRINCESS

A prisoner, my Lord? Can lock and key guard all things?

THE PRINCE

(*Not heeding her question*)

You will obey?

THE PRINCESS

I am your slave. I will obey.

THE PRINCE

Your body is slave, a weak obedience, but your spirit hid, harbors your spirit's power. I am wedded to your body, not your soul. If you would but raise those lids and let me look within, and read the language of those eyes, I

might know your thoughts. At your feet, you have all that earth can give, jewels, rich gowns and this great castle by the sea. What more can you want? You whom I captured as my slave, I have made a princess.

THE PRINCESS

(*Quietly turning her head toward the sea*)
I was a child. I am a woman.

THE PRINCE

What are you gazing at so far away?

THE PRINCESS

(*Dreamily*)
The sea has its ebb and flow. How beautiful is the flight of the sea birds, they are so free. How wonderful the wandering spirit of the wind.

PAGE

(*Enters hurriedly*)
My Lord, your men and horse await you outside the gate.

THE PRINCE

(*Seizing the Princess by the wrist*)
Strange, mysterious being that you are, your world is not mine.

THE PRINCESS

(*Flinching from him*)

You hurt me, my Lord.

THE PRINCE

Farewell. I leave you in charge of my mother. You do not wish to sit for your portrait, although the greatest painter of Florence has travelled many miles to paint you, and has already lost much time. I must have your portrait. Why do you not wish to sit for your portrait? —You are silent.

THE PRINCESS

(*Raising her head*)

My Lord. I—beseech you—

THE PRINCE

(*Interrupting impatiently*)

Again I ask why you do not wish your portrait painted. I must have my way.

THE PAINTER

(*Enters, gazing at the Princess*)

THE PRINCESS

(*Feeling the power and spell of his eyes upon her*)

My Lord, I will sit for my portrait.

THE PAINTER

(*Advances and kisses the Princess' hand, then turns to the Prince*)

I hear you are going to leave us.

THE PRINCE

Yes, important news calls me away. The Princess will sit for her portrait and on my return I shall expect to find your masterpiece finished.

THE PAINTER

If such beauty can be transposed, then the gods be with me. I tremble at my task. Not only must I master form, but image this gentle spirit, this tender soul; the task is a difficult one.

THE PRINCE

Then more the glory if you master it. I must now make haste.

(*He kisses the Princess' hand, saying*)

Farewell!

THE PAINTER

(*Turning to the Princess and gazing at her lovingly*)

At last you have consented!

THE PRINCESS

(*Looking away from him*)

I saw your eyes.

(*Then turning toward the stone stairs she slowly mounts a few steps*)

THE PAINTER

I am impatient to begin. Where shall it be, dear Princess Nephelê?

(*Gazing intently at her, he follows her*)

Oh, you are so beautiful, it will be a joy indeed to paint you.

THE PRINCESS

See, the tenderness of Spring is stealing into all living things. The breathing leaves are whispering; soon the delicate woodland flowers will wreath the sombre woods; and the rippling waves are chasing one another in joy.

Last Winter the slender trees were bare and whiplike against the sky, the blossoms in the woods in unborn silence, and the waters' surface cold and frozen—only the turbulent undercurrent struggling to free itself.

THE PAINTER

And now?—

(*The Princess Nephelê smiling, turns and slowly ascends the stone steps, pausing one moment in the doorway of the tower, where she looks down, returning his gaze intently, saying*)

THE PRINCESS

And now?—

(*and then as if in a dream she gazes at the sea. The Painter walks into the for-*

est. The Princess turns to enter her casement, stops and, watching a captive bird in its cage hung near the casement, she sings the following song:)

O passionate wild thoughts
  Hedged round with ghostly fears,
O passionate wild bird
  Beat thy wings against thy bars with tears;
My thoughts and thou are prisoners.

Peace, peace, O frail and passionate wild bird,
  If I could break my prison cage
And thou couldst wing
  Thy wandering ways,
We would be free, and pass
  Into the unfathomable maze.
Though we be lost in the abysmal night,
  Too long held prisoners since dim ancient days.

Sing, sing, O passionate wild bird,
  Sing thy prayer, thy dream of flight,
  I understand.
I cannot sing, I can but dream,
  And bear these captive thoughts in this strange land.

THE MIST

Scene II

The Princess
and
The Painter

The Painter

Where shall I paint your portrait, dear Princess, in the garden, or here on this balcony made in these wonderful rocks overlooking the sea, where we can hear the lapping of the waves on the rocks below?

The Princess

Here, here where I can watch the sea and the mist beyond.

The Painter

It is best here, for it is always here that I think of you, stepping from your window on to this rocky balcony, looking down into the depths of

the deep water, or looking far out into the horizon. When I look at your lips they are always smiling—that wonderful smile. How shall I paint it unless I paint you in the laughter of the sunlight, and then I raise my eyes and see your half-closed eyes, whose long black lashes curl till it seems as if your dark eyes were looking at me, and all the silent sorrow of life were held within; and then the sunlight fades and I would paint you in the mist. Will you not open your eyes and look at me?

THE PRINCESS

Look, look, dear friend, look, the mist is rising, the mist is whispering to the sea.

THE PAINTER

(*Interrupting*)

You are trembling.

THE PRINCESS

(*Continuing dreamily*)

And the white sea birds as they move over the water seem like gentle rolling waves, and cluster upon the edge of the deep water-grass like foam from dashing waters. On the shore, and beyond, the subtle delicate line of cloud hills are bathed in distant purple, and up, above, the lingering clouds are tinged with soft lights.

THE PAINTER

We must begin the portrait to-day, dear Princess, we have already lost many days—nay, they were not lost.

THE PRINCESS

See how quiet the sea is! The mist is veiling the sea and is shutting out the sunset's flush.

(*She stretches out her arm toward the mysterious mist creeping slowly toward them*)

THE PAINTER

There! I will paint you as you stand—your silver grey dress clinging to you in the wind, your delicate gauze veil falling over your shoulders, falling from your out-stretched arms to the ground, trembling like your body in the breeze, and the deep, red rose, nestling like a dove in its nest, in the low knot of your parted, straight, black hair, and the little white hand reaching out—for what, dear Nephelê, for what?

THE PRINCESS

The mist is creeping slowly toward us, and now sea and sky and mist are one. And the wind bathes my face in cool fluttering dashes, roaring in my ears like the sound in the sea shells. The water, air, and earth seem all at peace—Ah, what is Peace?

THE PAINTER

You are so beautiful, just as you are! I must paint and keep you so for all the ages—all in grey; grey rocks, the grey sea and the mist beyond, and the restless seabirds, only the red rose for colour. That wistful, wonderful look! Your pale face of sunshine and shadow.

(*Then after a silence he says*)

You promised to tell me to-day where the Prince saw you for the first time.

THE PRINCESS

My Lord found me after a terrible battle. All his enemies on the coast town were killed, the women without mercy were saved for the men. I fled, frightened, alone, and found shelter on the rocks, by the sea. When he saw me he approached. I did not move. "You are beautiful," he said, "I claim you as my slave, follow me." I did not move. "Follow me," he commanded.

(*She is silent for a moment, then continues*)

I was his slave—You have released me from his bondage.

THE PAINTER

I love you, I love you, yet no one could look at you and not love you. To have felt such love once is a divine gift. God's light through men.

O mysterious being, are you woman, or some beautiful personification of Love dropped down from the soundless mystery?

THE PRINCESS

Strange how time mingles yesterday and to-day in one. Yesterday I was not, to-day I am— Oh, the mist no longer sleeps, dear friend, it is closing around me. I am afraid.

(*The Painter rises and puts his arms about her, and kisses her hand*)

THE PAINTER

Do not fear, dear Princess.

(*The red rose falls from her hair*)

See, the red rose falls on my heart, it is mine.

THE PRINCESS

The mist is blinding me—The bell, the bell, do you not hear the bell in the mist? At night the mist steals up and beckons me.

(*The bell is heard softly at first and then slightly louder*)

THE PAINTER

This day and this hour I have lived in joy, come what will. You are not mine because you are another's; yet you no longer belong to him, because you are mine.

THE PRINCESS

The mist, the mist, dear friend, do you hear the bell? Fold me in your arms, it is so I would be lost in the great mystery. You have given my soul wings wherewith to fly; you have stirred my heart with the depth of your voice; you have taught my eyes to gaze inward, finding beauty therein; you have given me Love, the everlasting possession of my soul. Oh, the touch of your tender hands awaken wonders that I dreamed of but never knew, and now your strong kind arm makes wonder more than dream.

THE PAINTER

I cannot see your eyes, the mist envelops us, but I know they are open. I can feel their depths. My shrine is in those eyes. The mist hides all things. The mist is only shadow, dear, the light is still beyond, as darkness is the veil of light, and night is the shadow of day.

THE PRINCESS

I was in a dream, I am awake. The world is different when love is found. Now I understand for the first time sorrow and happiness. Dear friend, the mist surrounds me, but I am no longer afraid, for I have felt love.

(The mist enfolds them and they no longer can be seen; the bell tolls quiet-

ly. After a few moments this song is heard from the Princess' window)

In this prison cage
my song I cannot sing,
For the wind would bear
my secret on his wing.
Yet dear wind if I
whisper in thine ear,
Quiet, soft and low,
Love and God alone can hear.

For dear wind, divine
and earthly love has come to me,
But the mist enfolds
my Heart, I cannot see.
Deep, deep I drank
from the well, that sets me free,
And I breathe the cool
shadow of the Great Green Tree.

THE MIST

Scene III

Summer

(*Dawn—The bell is quietly tolling. The figure of a man is faintly seen through the mist groping his way to the Princess' lighted window. Men below with lanterns moving to and fro in great confusion. Sound of the waves on the rocks below*)

The Painter

(*Knocking at the Princess' window*)

Princess, dear Nephelê, come to your window,
I heard your voice calling me in my sleep.

(*Knocking again with agitation on the window*)

Come to your window, why do you not answer me?

(*Men with lanterns moving to and fro in the mist*)

(*The painter shakes the window violently*)

I cannot undo the fastening! Loka, are you in there? Loka, where is the Princess?

LOKA

(*Flinging wide the casement and stepping out*)

The Princess cannot be found, Signor.
We cannot find my beloved mistress.
The men are searching everywhere.
During the storm in the night my mistress called me and told me to shut the casement. The mist was entering, taking such strange forms, haunting her, she said, as it rose up from the sea. She could not sleep, it oppressed her, and she cried out, "The loneliness of the sea is in my heart." I closed the casement, and she bade me go and sleep. This morning, only a short time ago, I entered the room to ask if all was well. Alas! I found the casement wide open and my mistress gone. Signor, where is my beloved mistress?

THE PAINTER

I heard her voice calling me, and in my dream I saw her white arms held out to me. Do not pity me, she cried, my heart has found the great secret. Such love is only born of dreams; the dream is mine, the dream is true. I have lived

my dream, though short its life. Hark, I hear the bell! The mist enshrouds me, but I am free. I am no longer a bond slave; you have set me free. It is the Eternity of Peace, yet the Fire of Anguish.

(*Men with lanterns are moving to and fro in the mist*)

A Voice

(*Crying from among them*)

Search along the cliffs back of the castle where the tide comes in.

Loka

(*In despair*)

My mistress, oh, my beloved mistress.

(*Loud and violent knocking at the gate. Sound of men and horses without*)

A Second Voice

Search along the sands, through the forest.

The Prince

(*From without, commanding*)

Open, open the gate!

Loka

It is my Lord returning, Signor! What shall I do? I fear the Prince, he is cruel. My beloved mistress!

THE PRINCE

(*Still shaking the gate violently*)

Open, open the gate! It is I, the Prince!

THE PAINTER

(*Despairingly*)

Oh Nephelê! Nephelê!

(*The mist descends, the bell continues to sound even after the fall of the curtain*)

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